

Legacy of



His training as a Black Belt in Martial Arts gave Capt Otis Hooper the discipline and motivation to succeed, but a meeting with members of The Tuskegee Airmen as a US Air Force Academy (USAFA) freshman, provided the inspiration and direction.

Capt Hooper is a KC-135 Instructor Pilot, executive officer for the 344th Air Refueling Squadron commander at McConnell AFB, Kansas, and 2004 winner of the Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Capt Robert W. Williams Military Award for the Department of Defense Outstanding Company Grade Officer (CGO) of the Year. The award recognizes an Airman's achievements in the areas of professional achievement, development, and community/public service and is given in honor of Capt Williams, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen.

Meeting several surviving members during his freshman year was the catalyst that changed his life. Martial Arts gave him the discipline to succeed, but hearing their story first-hand gave him the strength and inspiration to endure and excel when the pressure was on. "Knowing what they endured gave me the strength to continue on, because what I was experiencing paled in comparison; no matter how hectic or bad I thought things were. Talking to them and hearing their flying stories inspired me to pursue a career as a pilot." Discipline, strength, and inspiration are enduring qualities in an individual, but these character traits only lay the foundation for the rest of the story behind the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Capt Hooper continued, "I took some time this weekend to put some thoughts down about what makes the Tuskegee Airmen special to me and how their story has impacted every aspect of my life. After learning their story first-hand, and developing a personal relationship with remaining members of The Tuskegee Airmen, I've developed and adopted what I call the 8 Codes of Leadership:

*First and foremost is the importance of **MENTORSHIP**. We don't have all the answers to life's challenges, but knowing where to find those answers is what makes a great leader/mentor. In turn, a good leader must take what he has learned from his predecessors and pass the torch onto the next generation. I have had the opportunity to receive outstanding guidance and direction from my Squadron and Wing Commanders. There are great people in the AF, seek them out, and you'll be amazed how willing they are to help.*

*A true Leader/Commander is **DEDICATED** to his goals and objectives. The Tuskegee Airmen never gave up, and proved that the antidote to racism was, indeed, excellence in performance. This is as true today as it was in the early 1940's when the first Tuskegee Airmen took to the air. Despite racial tension and political barriers, the original Tuskegee Airmen persevered through difficulties and against seemingly insurmountable odds.*

*The dedication shown by these men led to a word that the Tuskegee Airmen could not, and did not receive during or after World War II: **RESPECT**. Today, as in years past, if a good leader does not respect his troops, his troops will not respect him - how then are they going to achieve the goal of a successful mission? Respect must **ALWAYS** be maintained.*

***COOPERATION**...while stationed in Africa, General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. instilled in his men the importance of cooperation and to accomplish the mission by working together regardless of the adversity they faced. Likewise, during my first year at the USAFA, my classmates and I were taught the importance of teamwork by our upperclassmen, who encouraged us to reach our objectives together, as a single, cohesive unit.*

*The Tuskegee Airmen have a very significant place in my heart when it comes to the word **DISCIPLINE** — to have the discipline to go the extra mile armed with initiative, maintaining excellence and remaining poised, even when the road may not be easily traversed. Who better than the original Tuskegee Airmen to illustrate this? The Tuskegee Airmen were all part of a program that many secretly hoped would fail, but they continued to fight and prove that they were among the best and became the closest example of perfection the Air Force has ever seen.*

*A true leader must believe in himself and be unafraid to try something new or speak out on behalf of his men; instilling true and total **CONFIDENCE** in each other. The Tuskegee Airmen learned to look within for strength, and believed in themselves even when others doubted them. General Davis was not afraid to go to Congress and speak up in support of his men, and because he believed in his men, they believed in him.*

Excellence

By Capt Otis Hooper, McConnell AFB, Ks.

Photo by TSgt Ben Bloker



ENTHUSIASM can't be overlooked. Their enthusiastic attitudes ensured the Tuskegee Airmen's amazing success. Enthusiasm is contagious, and history has shown us the good that has come out of positive thinking. When faced with a bad situation, a good commander looks for the good in the situation, even when others fail to see it.

Last but not least comes, **SELF RESPECT**. The Tuskegee Airmen stood strong in the face of adversity. Even when no one else respected them, they respected themselves. In their honor, I have always had a good sense of self respect, simply because I know that, 'Without knowing your past, you have no future.'

I feel that I owe it to the Tuskegee Airmen to continue to seek perfection in everything that I do, as there is no argument with excellence. Like those before me, I want to provide optimism and inspiration through my performance, in hope that my success will help advertise the opportunities to excel that the military offers to other minorities. I am a proud and honored member of the Virginia Tidewater Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, and I encourage those reading, to learn more about these great men."

— Capt Otis Hooper

Military service has always taken a special sort of person to take up arms in defense of one's ideals, freedoms, and the defenseless. It's tough, demanding work that requires knowledge, commitment, and a willingness to put service and others before themselves. To rise above, and be a trailblazer takes a special, select group, and the Tuskegee Airmen were just such a group. Their achievements fighting against both the enemy and segregation paved the way for integration of the armed services, and brought about positive change through discipline, strength, and inspiration. Capt Hooper carries on that tradition and honors their legacy, and their stories continue to inspire Airmen to this day.

And therein lays the story.